

[CONCEPT, Vol. XXXVI (2013)]

## **“How Are Things in Glocca Morra?”: Vilifying Capitalism and Prejudice through a Socialist Utopia in *Finian’s Rainbow***

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What does a leprechaun have to do with racial integration in America? Though they seem unrelated, the 1947 musical *Finian’s Rainbow* by E.Y. Harburg and Fred Saidy uses the integration of Irish mythology and socialist utopian ideals to promote the racial integration of the American South. *Finian’s Rainbow* is set in the fictional American town of Rainbow Valley, Missitucky. The town, inhabited by people of different colors living in harmony, symbolizes an American utopia threatened by the dangers of capitalism and racism. So where does the leprechaun fit in? Having followed Irish immigrants Finian and his daughter Sharon to Rainbow Valley to retrieve his pot of gold, the leprechaun enhances the magical quality of a place as idealistic as Glocca Morra, a kind of Irish Eden. His magic allows for the otherwise impossible physical and mental transformations of a racist senator named Billboard Rawkins, the play’s main source of conflict. *Finian’s Rainbow* is a political satire and relies on specific historical references and allusions. Therefore, this paper will analyze the energies of the text from the perspective of new historicism. Using Marxist theory and the theories of Michel Foucault, this paper will explore how lyricist and playwright E.Y. Harburg, influenced by socialist rhetoric, illustrates an integrated, magical, American utopia which highlights and satirizes the very real problems caused by Post-WWII capitalist and racist ideology in the United States.

### **“The Begat”: Yip Harburg and the Creation of *Finian’s Rainbow***

In analyzing a period piece like *Finian’s Rainbow*, it is necessary to take into account the historical and cultural context in which the author was writing. The political and racial messages of the musical might seem dated to a contemporary audience, but in 1947, “*Finian* proved to be more advanced relative to the politics of the time than Yip had initially intended” (Meyerson and Harburg, 1993: 270). In order to accurately and thoroughly discuss the energies of *Finian’s Rainbow*, this paper will consider the text from a new historicist perspective. John Brannigan explains new historicism as “a mode of reading history, and the political and social forces at work in historical periods” (1998: 12). Theatrical texts, since they are meant to be performed, can literally make these power relations visible to an audience. *Finian’s Rainbow* is a prime example of such a text because it is “a work of socialist analysis in the form of the American musical” (Meyerson and Harburg, 1993: 221). It is based on Yip Harburg’s personal politics, or his opinions on power relations, and his desire to express them to the public.

Harburg was not a member of the Communist party, but he sympathized with Marxist ideals and structured *Finian's Rainbow* “as an attack on racism and capitalism” which still manages to entertain and delight audiences with colorful music and witty dialogue (Meyerson and Harburg, 1993: 223). He believed that musical theater was capable of making profound statements, and though the plot of *Finian's Rainbow* is complex and convoluted, it reflects inspiration from multiple sources:

“Of course I was still fed up with our economic system and the whole idiocy of taking gold from California and planting it in Fort Knox. Suddenly, the three streams of thought about Bilbo and Rankin, the Irish stories [James Stephen's *The Crock of Gold*], and about Fort Knox clicked in my mind.” (Meyerson and Harburg, 1993: 222)

Harburg's frustration with the capitalist system is illustrated mainly through the storyline involving Finian, Woody, and Shears and Robust; he uses these characters to expose the flaws of American economy. However, Harburg also had a strong distaste for the racist discourse spouted by politicians like Theodore Bilbo and John Rankin, who supported Jim Crow ideology and pushed for segregation. Interestingly, both of these Mississippi politicians were also “important in the anti-communism movement on a national level” (The University of Southern Mississippi, n.d.). Bilbo, facing much opposition in the mid-1940s, “labeled all people against him as being communists” (ibid.). Rankin helped pass the “amendment [which] resulted in the House Un-American Activities Committee” and “was one of the key members to push for the investigations into Hollywood's connections with communism in the 1940s” (ibid.). Therefore, Harburg had two reasons to push against them: he abhorred their racism and was affected by their attacks on socialist ideology.

It is important to note that the writers describe the musical as a satire; its purpose is to expose the flaws of society. In this piece, Harburg creates a utopian world, inspired by the Irish mythology and magical realism in *The Crock of Gold*, to make satirical comments about current social, economic, and political conditions in the United States. Harburg's efforts demonstrate the new historicist theory that “power needs to have subversion” and that “culture is a field of much ideological contest and contradiction” (Brannigan, 1998: 8, 12). Therefore, it is essential to study the text of *Finian's Rainbow* in conjunction with information about its creator and historical context to elucidate the manner in which it expresses contemporary cultural ideologies and power structures.

### **“When the Idle Poor Become the Idle Rich”: Musical as Socialist Critique**

Like many artists during the height of the ‘Red Scare,’ Yip Harburg was blacklisted for the liberal ideas and socialist messages implicit in his films. Harburg, however, did not let this inconvenience hamper his creative production and “continued to work on Broadway – show business's only blacklist-free zone – through the 1950s and later” (Grant, 2004: 68). *Finian's Rainbow* was one of several theatrical projects Harburg created to express his passionate political

views. Though he disguised much of his more cynical beliefs with traditional American songs and conventional musical structure, Harburg's affinity for Marxist theory shines through in several aspects of the musical. As Mark Grant explains, "Harburg was trying to say not just that he thought McCarthy was the un-American one, but that the musical play was an artistic form that could legitimately express something grand and unfrivolous" (2004: 72). The playwright paints a picture of America in which the common folk are the real patriots and where the flaws of government officials threaten the harmonious structure of society.

The character of Woody Mahoney is one such patriot, who serves to represent the basic tenets of Marxism throughout the musical; he is essentially characterized as a socialist hero. Acknowledging the controversial nature of his occupation, he reveals his true identity to Sharon:

WOODY: [...] In some circles I'm considered a sinister character. *You know what I am?*  
SHARON: *(Alarmed)* No.  
WOODY: Brace yourself. Grab hold of that log. I'm a *union organizer*.  
SHARON: *(Relieved)* Oh. Well, I believe in unions.  
(Harburg and Saidy, 1947: 39-40)

As a 'union organizer,' Woody embodies Marx's theory that "the workers begin to form combinations (Trades' Unions) against the bourgeois" and leads his townsfolk in a rebellion against the capitalistic government officials (1906: 26). It is important that Sharon expresses her approval of Woody's politics because it allows her to become his supporter and, by virtue of her strong-willed personality and close relationship with Woody, an honorary leader in the American socialist movement.

However, Marxist theory is most colorfully articulated through Harburg's lyrics. Three songs in particular demonstrate the influence of socialist ideas on *Finian's Rainbow*: "This Time of the Year," "Necessity," and "When The Idle Poor Become the Idle Rich." When the sheriff arrives to collect taxes at the start of the play, the citizens of Rainbow Valley protest. Eventually, they force the sheriff out of the town, singing "We can't be bothered with a mortgage man, this time of the year! [...] For Spring don't care about a mortgage man, this time of the year!" (8). The contest over the land in Rainbow Valley is central to the play, and ultimately is the thread which connects all of the different subplots. As Karl Marx explains in his Manifesto, "the distinguishing feature of Communism is not the abolition of property generally, but the abolition of bourgeois property [...] In this sense, the theory of Communism may be summed up in a single sentence: Abolition of private property" (1906: 34). Rainbow Valley is inhabited by a community of racially diverse sharecroppers, and is meant to epitomize the Communist ideal of shared property. Senator Rawkins, via the sheriff, wants to acquire all of the land in the state of Missitucky for himself. Significantly, Rainbow Valley is the only piece of land he is not able to acquire; when Finian and Sharon arrive on the scene, they provide the money that the town needs to pay off the taxes and allow the town to continue as a model of a socialist society.

The song “Necessity” also illustrates Harburg’s socialist leanings. It comes in at the end of Act I to remind the audience of the economic issues introduced at the beginning. The scene includes a number of sharecroppers moaning about the need to work tedious and tiresome days just to make a living: “Necessity – It’s plain to see/ What a lovely old world/ This silly old world/ Could be – / But, man, it’s all in a mess/ Account of necess-/It” (77). On the surface, this song seems to speak generally about the displeasure of work. However, the characters singing all belong to a rural, working class. Therefore, their song is more than just a complaint, but evidence of a “class struggle” and therefore, according to Marx, “a political struggle” (1906: 27).

Perhaps the most satiric of the ‘socialist’ songs in *Finian’s Rainbow* is “When the Idle Poor Become the Idle Rich.” Act II begins with news that Shears and Robust, a.k.a. Sears Roebuck, has heard of the discovery of gold in Rainbow Valley and sent a mail-order catalogue to its inhabitants. The stage directions explain that “*Possession of gold [or its equivalent: belief that they possess it] has brought them the final cockeye luxury. They can now afford to stop wanting things they can buy and to start buying things they don’t want*” (96). This song overtly critiques capitalism for perpetuating a materialistic culture and class divisions. It satirizes the contemporary economic structure, claiming that “When the idle poor become the idle rich,/ You’ll never know just who is who – or who is which” (96). In other words, Harburg argues that wealth does not define character and class distinctions are arbitrary.

Senator Rawkins, who first appears in the setting of his “Colonial estate,” represents the Southern American bourgeois values against which Woody is fighting (44). Through the dynamic between Senator Rawkins and the townsfolk of Rainbow Valley, Harburg illustrates Marx’s claim that “[modern society] has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones” and that “every class struggle is a political struggle” (1906: 12, 27). Senator Rawkins claims patriotic motives for acquiring all the land in Rainbow Valley: “Let ‘em go build their dam on the Potomac instead of desecratin’ this heaven-given valley with a lot of copper wire” (47). Woody, however, explains the Senator’s motives differently, saying that he’s afraid that the electricity provided by the dam will afford greater opportunities to the ‘lower class’: “Shacks lightin’ up, people learnin’ to read and write, everybody makin’ money” (23). The Senator is determined to own the entire valley because, to him, it represents not only wealth but also power over the working class.

In 20<sup>th</sup> century America, and in this musical, oppression is also related to race. “By the middle of the twentieth century, black people had long endured a physical and social landscape of white supremacy” (Baldwin, 2011). Eighty years after the Emancipation Proclamation, African Americans were still, by and large, considered socially and politically inferior and were primarily working class. Senator Billboard Rawkins, in addition to illustrating the hypocrisy of the government and capitalism, represents the racist sentiments of many Americans at the time. The audience is first introduced to Rawkins at his plantation home, but before we even meet the character, we see a glimpse of his ideology through his assistant, Buzz Collins. Howard, an

African-American college student from Rainbow Valley, visits Rawkins' estate to apply for a job and is interviewed by Buzz:

BUZZ: [...] Do you want a job here as a butler or don't you?  
HOWARD: Yes, sir, I do. I've got another year to go at Tuskegee. (45)

Though Howard is clearly a polite, intelligent young man, Buzz, familiar with Rawkins' preferences, insists that Howard serve a mint julep in the stereotypical "*minstrel tradition of Dixie shuffle and exaggerated accent*" (44). Buzz explains that "it's a mark of breed, here in the South. Makes for kindly feelings between master and servant" (45). Though Buzz and Rawkins seem to be stuck in the Civil War, this extreme kind of racism is not far from the truth for 1947. Senator Bilbo, one of Rawkins' namesake's, was famous for his racist epithets and policies: he "was a well-known segregationist" and even proposed an act "to repatriate African Americans to Liberia" (The University of Southern Mississippi, n.d.).

One of the main conflicts in *Finian's Rainbow* arises when Rawkins, after hearing about the discovery of gold in Rainbow Valley, attempts to acquire the land by evicting half of its population. He claims that the citizens of the town have been breaking "The law of the South. There's a restrictive covenant which forbids Negroes to build homes on this land – depreciates property values" (81). This plot point is rooted in reality, for as Davarian Baldwin explains, "African Americans did not have the freedom to choose where and how to live due to the effects of state-sponsored restrictive covenants" (2011). Rawkins is presumably racist out of habit, but he also, like his namesakes, utilizes racist discourse for economic and political gain. Harburg makes clear his disgust for politicians like Bilbo and Rankin through Sharon's reaction to the Senator's policies. Finian and Sharon are new to America; as Irishmen, they represent an oppressed community in Europe. Finian reveals this aspect of his character by assuming that "The British are back!" when Og says Ireland is in trouble (31). Historically the Irish suffered much persecution from the English because of their cultural differences. Thus, the experience of Finian and Sharon could be seen as a parallel to the experience of African Americans in Rainbow Valley. It is reasonable, then, that Sharon so strongly and passionately detests the Senator's bigotry. In a pivotal moment, she says,

There's nothing wrong with being black – (*With mounting emotion at Rawkins*) But there's something wrong with the world that he and his kind have made for Henry. I wish he could know what that world is like. I wish to God he were black so –

(*Suddenly there is darkness – a crash of thunder – a streak of lightning. When the lights go up, RAWKINS is disclosed as a trembling heap on the ground. The people are drawn back, aghast. From their faces it is evident that SHARON's wish has materialized and that the SENATOR is now, indeed, a black man. [...]*). (84)

At this point in the play, Sharon is assisted by magic to produce the kind of change which was perhaps desired by many socialists and civil rights activists in the 1940s: for the oppressors to

walk in the shoes of the oppressed. Rawkins laments later in the play that as a black man “[...] You can’t buy yourself a cold beer on a hot day. (*With disgust*) You can’t even go into a church and pray” (111). However, what upsets Rawkins is that *he* is currently unable to do those things; he is not moved to make changes to his political ideology until Og the leprechaun, with magic, changes Rawkins’ personality by “[broadening] out that narrow mind a little” (113). From this point on, Rawkins is a changed man and renounces his former beliefs. What is ironic, and perhaps sad, about the device of magic, however, is that it alludes to the impossibility of a solution for class oppression and racism.

### **“Look to the Rainbow”: Socialist Utopia in Rainbow Valley**

The musical theatre genre is characterized by the conventions of heightened realism; when characters break out into songs and choreographed dance routines, the audience is required to suspend their disbelief if they still want to earnestly appreciate the characters’ journeys. Because musical theatre requires willing participation and acceptance from the audience, it is an ideal medium for voicing controversial ideas. As Bruce Kirle explains, “musicals,” especially those written in the Post-WWII years, “provided hope that tensions in society, seemingly insoluble and bitter, could indeed be bridged” (2005: 128). *Finian’s Rainbow* is a musical which provides such hope. The tension is bridged soon after Sharon and Finian arrive in Rainbow Valley by an overture from Woody. He says to Sharon, “Welcome to Rainbow Valley, ma’am. Hope you’re gonna find it cozy here. Hope you’re gonna like us. What’s your name?” (26). Though the play opens with a conflict between townspeople and government, the audience is soon shown that Rainbow Valley is an inviting place which contains the potential for complete harmony.

In his chapter on “Popular Musicals As Utopia,” Kirle references Rodgers’ and Hammerstein’s *Oklahoma!* as a paradigmatic example for the 1940s, but many of his observations also apply to *Finian’s Rainbow* (2005). Like *Oklahoma!*, *Finian’s Rainbow* was “an instance in which the musical offered a utopian solution to the conflict between the New Deal and mid-American conservatives and populists” based on an “idealized vision of small-town American life” (Kirle, 2005: 131, 134). Rainbow Valley is inhabited by white and black sharecroppers, all economically and socially equal to one another, living in peaceful coexistence. This was Harburg’s dream for American towns in the 1940s plagued by the racist discourse of politicians and society in general. Not only are the townsfolk unified from the beginning of the play, but they continue to welcome new members into the community.

Sharon and Finian, literally right off the boat from Europe, are almost immediately embraced as Rainbow Valley citizens. At the end of Act II, the main antagonist, Senator Rawkins, sees the error of his ways and also becomes integrated into the town:

RAWKINS: No, son. I’m with the people. All part of my new platform – anti-poll tax, a dam in every valley, and a rainbow in every pot. And incidentally, I’m runnin’ for re-election next November. (139)

Since Rawkins is accepted by the community, he is able to accept the community in return and fulfill his obligations as their representative. Kirle says that in *Oklahoma!* “the point [...] is not to create an accurate history but to mythologize community and the unification, acceptance, and tolerance of all who agree to abide by the social contract” (2005: 139). The senator’s transformation in *Finian’s Rainbow* is facilitated by magic, and therefore is unrealistic. The town of Rainbow Valley and the state of Missitucky are obviously and intentionally fictional; they represent not a historical truth, but a mythologization of an idyllic community. Even Og, who is not only from a foreign nation but also belongs to a different *species*, assimilates into the community by the end. He laments throughout the play that he is losing his magic and becoming increasingly human, rejecting any identification with the human race. However, when Susan kisses him for the first time he fully experiences one of the ‘joys’ of humanity and changes his mind: “[...] *His voice instantly drops into a virile bass.*) Fairyland was never like this” (136). With this remark, Og accepts his new identity as a human and his unification with the town, illustrating again that in the utopic Rainbow Valley the community is open to “all who agree to abide by the social contract” (Kirle, 2005: 139).

Dragan Kláic in his book on utopian and dystopian drama, says that, Marx is actually both utopian and millenarian despite all his claims of the scientific character of his socialist ideas. His ideas of a distant future of freedom and of communism as a system of abundance and free association among producers are, in their roots, utopian. (1991: 34)

Though Marx never claimed that his political ideas were utopian, Kláic argues that they are, by nature, rooted in utopian ideals. Yip Harburg undoubtedly saw this connection as well, and therefore, created the utopian world of *Finian’s Rainbow* and Rainbow Valley to promote Marxist theories in America. In his first scene on stage, Finian explains to his daughter Sharon the theoretical reasoning behind his decision to immigrate to Rainbow Valley, Missitucky.

FINIAN: [...] “The peculiar nature of the soil in and about Fort Knox brings an additional quality to gold, hitherto unsuspected by either Karl Marx or the gold itself. This causes the gold to radiate a powerful influence throughout America. It fertilizes the oranges in Florida, activates the assembly lines in Detroit, causes skyscrapers to sprout from the gutters of New York, and produces a bumper crop of millionaires.” (*The pince-nez dutifully drops*) I rest me case. (17)

Finian’s theory represents a fanciful capitalist perspective on wealth meant to evoke economic notions popular in the United States at the time. As Michel Foucault theorizes in his book *The Order of Things*, the

relation between metal and merchandise [...] is the one that was established by Providence when it buried gold and silver mines under the earth, and caused them to grow [...] Between all things that man may need or desire, and the glittering, hidden veins where those metals grow in darkness, there is an absolute correspondence. (1970, p. 172)

Finian recognizes that gold is more than just currency; is a living entity, like plants and animals. To Finian, as well as Foucault, gold is glorious and mysterious because it represents the possibility of attaining all his desires. Sharon, familiar with her father's wild money-making schemes, accuses him of dreaming up an economic theory with no factual basis:

FINIAN: By the McLonergan Theory of Economics, built on a solid foundation of mathematics, logic –

SHARON: And moonbeams? (15-16)

But in *Finian's Rainbow*, the gold is substantiated by its magical qualities; it is literally imbued with a kind of power which can enact change. Therefore, the gold holds the promise not only of material wealth, but of social change.

The McLonergan Theory of Economics exemplifies Finian's perception of American culture and represents an ideology which becomes central to the plot. Louis Althusser, influenced by the theories of Karl Marx, claims that "ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (2004: 44). He believes that ideologies are constructed and that they are not 'real' in and of themselves, but that they emerge from individuals' perception of reality. According to Althusser, "[ideologies] do make allusion to reality, and [...] they need only be 'interpreted' to discover the reality of the world behind their imaginary representation of the world" (2004: 44). Finian, as an Irishman, is distanced from American culture and is therefore able to evaluate the mysteries of the 'American Dream' with a critical eye. Influenced by his own cultural connection to the land, he envisions American wealth as the product of a literal fertilization. As he explains to Sharon, Finian believes that if he becomes an American, he will in turn join the "bumper crop of millionaires" (17).

Finian's theory seems to become realized at the end of first act, once the citizens of Rainbow Valley find out that gold has been discovered on their land and that Shears and Robust have sent them a mail-order catalogue. They have not even seen the gold itself, but they already begin to reap its benefits:

WOODY: Well, you've got your break now – all of you – this piece of yellow paper. It's credit! You can turn it into tractors –

SHARON: – turn the tractors into tobacco –

WOODY: – and turn the tobacco into money faster than you can dig the gold out o' the ground! (87)

The notion of 'credit' suggests that the idea of currency rather than the material currency itself is what contains value. Foucault supports this idea, saying that gold "resides [in the depths of the earth] like an inverted promise of happiness" (1970: 173). Gold itself, then, is utopian in a sense: even when it is not tangible it provides the promise of future happiness. Woody even claims that the essence of the gold in the ground has contributed to "the golden crispiness, the golden



mellowness, the golden goldenness of Lucky Gold [tobacco]”, the town’s main export, and therefore, has boosted the town’s economy merely by being present (103).

When Shears and Robust demand payment from Finian for their wares, he explains his rationale for keeping the gold buried, saying “Well, if you remove the gold from the ground, you remove incentive, and if you remove incentive, you wreck free enterprise. (*In a roar*) Right?” (100). Knowledgeable about American economics, Finian uses his previously established ideology to take advantage of the system. In Althusser’s words, he creates an argument based on “the expression of the relation between [him] and [his] ‘world,’ that is, the (overdetermined) unity of the real relation and the imaginary relation between [him] and [his] real conditions of existence” (1969: 233-4). Finian owns his place as an immigrant to America and cleverly creates an identity and logic that conforms to his own perception of society and suits his own needs. It becomes clear by the end of the play, however, that Finian’s and Woody’s interaction with Shears and Robust is a tongue-in-cheek socialist statement criticizing materialism and greed in the United States; though it exudes the impression of power for a while, the gold cannot sustain its value for very long and the town’s literal wealth is only temporary.

Og the leprechaun warns Finian early on that the pot of gold is magic and is only good for three wishes. Ultimately his warning and Sharon’s previous apprehensions prove true:

OG: (*Comes forward with his derby covering the crock*) Dross, McLonergan, like I told you. (*He brings forth the crock of gold. But it has, alas! lost its glow, its poetry, and its shape. It is now a drab and battered kitchen utensil unworthy of even a pawnshop.*) (140)

Rather than multiplying as Finian originally thought, the gold actually depreciates in value each time a wish is made; it is essentially “no more than a token accepted by common consent – hence, a pure fiction” (Foucault, 1970: 181). Therefore, like the gold, Finian’s ideology is revealed to be an illusion. “In ideology the real relation is inevitably invested in the imaginary relation, a relation that *expresses a will* (conservative, conformist, reformist, or revolutionary), a hope or a nostalgia, rather than describing a reality” (Althusser, 1969: 234). As Althusser suggests, Finian constructs an ideology which will support his decision to immigrate to America and feed his hope for a comfortable life (1969, 2004). Though the ideology is only a reflection of his own whimsical perception of American capitalistic ideals, Finian’s relationship to the ‘American Dream’ and the promise of a better future illustrates the reality of his identity as an Irish immigrant and his emerging role as an American.

Finian’s Irish-American dream frames the musical and is the main through-line which illustrates the story’s utopian qualities. When he and Sharon first arrive, the hope for forward movement is articulated by Finian:

FINIAN: Don’t sit ye down! It’s the hill beyond yon hill.  
SHARON: Finian McLonergan, I’ve been hearin’ about the hill beyond yon hill ever since we left Ireland [...] (11)

The Irish immigrants' physical movement to America parallels the social/political movement that the citizens of Rainbow Valley strive for in opposition to Senator Rawkins. The "hill beyond yon hill" represents a utopian ideal. As Kláic claims, "utopia tells not what presumably happened once, but what could happen in the future; in this sense it is a speculative myth, a myth in a predictive form" (1991: 37). Though *Finian's Rainbow* is set in present-day 1947, Finian and the inhabitants represent a forward motion, toward the future; Senator Rawkins and his sidekicks represent a motion "forward to yesterday," which the musical pushes strongly against (47).

An important element of the piece which contributes largely to the utopian atmosphere is the presence of magic. "It is possible to see utopias as a branch of fantastic literature, where wishful fantasies and escapist dreams are phrased in terms of collective experiences" (Kláic, 1991: 41). Og the leprechaun undoubtedly represents the fantastical element of the utopia. Though Rainbow Valley is an idealistic place, it is threatened by negative outside forces. Therefore, magic is necessary to negotiate between the two worlds. When Finian first introduces the idea of a leprechaun, Sharon does not take him seriously:

SHARON: But, father – leprechauns aren't *real* – they're only gnomes and elves, imaginary creatures in fairytales and legends.

FINIAN: That's what most people think, I'll grant you, but, thank God, they're in the minority. (20)

She voices the practical, logical reaction, but Finian soon establishes the convention that magic, in this world, *is* a reality. Because one of the characters is a leprechaun and one of the central concretes is a magic pot of gold, the audience can then more easily accept the possibility of the "wishful fantasies and escapist dreams" associated with utopia (Kláic, 1991: 41).

*Finian's Rainbow* comes to an end like most musical comedies: with a wedding and the resolution of all conflict. Finian, the character who originally articulated the utopia, leaves Rainbow Valley to continue his search for a better future.

FINIAN: Aye, Finian's Rainbow. It never fails to come up when the McLonergans are down [...] Sure, there's no longer a pot o' gold at the end of it – but a beautiful new world under it. Make it shine for Sharon. (*He kisses SHARON a tender good-bye*) Farewell me friends. I'll see you all someday in Glocca Morra. (*He starts away along the curving arc of the rainbow*).

WOODY: Sharon, where *is* Glocca Morra?

SHARON: (*Mysteriously*) There's no such place, Woody. It's only in father's head. (143)

Glocca Morra, the utopian ideal that Finian and the rest of the characters have been striving for since the beginning of the play, turns out to be a dream. Finian's ideology and construction of the world around him created utopia in Rainbow Valley, but the truth is that ugliness and injustice still exist in the outside world. Glocca Morra is an illusion, and will always be slightly out of reach.

Utopia is often positioned as an ideal model against which the insufficiencies, backwardness, and squalor of existing reality can be measured. Utopia then becomes a critical tool, a mirror that exposes and ridicules the real world through distancing and distortion. (Kláic, 1991: 41)

Though the ending of *Finian's Rainbow* appears to align with other musical comedies, the ultimate message is more characteristic of satire. By showing the audience a utopian vision of small-town America in which magic conveniently solves racism and class struggle, Harburg exposes the very *real* issues facing the United States; issues which need to be addressed in a realistic manner. Leprechauns and magic can exist in musical theatre, but ultimately, as the play suggests, magic is an illusion. In the real world, people need to envision a future and pursue it as fervently as possible. Despite its complex story and extraordinary character and plotline combinations, Harburg's socialist and utopian ideals shine through in *Finian's Rainbow*, impressing upon the audience how important it is to "Look, look, look the rainbow,/ Follow the fellow who follows a dream" (28).

### **"That Great 'Come-and-Get-It' Day": Conclusion**

The original 1947 production of *Finian's Rainbow* was very popular and the show was revived several times on Broadway in the two decades following its premiere. A film version was released in 1968, but by the 1970s the civil rights movement was in full swing and *Finian's Rainbow*, to many, began to seem like a snapshot of a bygone era. If, as Jonathan Mandell suggests, *Finian's Rainbow*, "for all its moments of relevance, cannot be (or at least has not been) sufficiently updated to quell completely the qualms of an audience with 21<sup>st</sup> century sensibilities," then what inspired the 2009 Broadway revival (Mandell, 2009)? Ernie Harburg, son of lyricist Yip Harburg, had been pushing for decades for an updated Broadway revival of his father's groundbreaking show. He explains in an interview that the work's main themes are relevant today because "the major issues of our time include easy credit and its consequences, the pressure of necessity versus pleasure for poor people, [and] the way people divided by race work against each other instead of together for mutual economic benefit" (Napoleon, 2009). Mandell, though he expresses concern about some of the musical's content, does agree that it speaks to modern issues: "There was one theme from the original production that seemed old-fashioned even in 1947, but has, unfortunately, gained new relevance – the perils of modern capitalism" (2009). Though racism certainly still exists, and, as Ernie Harburg explains, is often perpetuated by economic greed and corrupt power relations, the main answer to the dramaturgical question "why this play now?" is its sharp "satire of our economic system" (Napoleon, 2009).

The satirical commentary in *Finian's Rainbow* is indicative of a very specific historical moment in the United States, and therefore, the musical is extremely useful "as a mode of reading history, and the political and social forces at work" in post-WWII America (Brannigan, 1998: 12). Therefore, it has a considerable amount of educational value: gaining a better understanding of our past can help us, as a society, avoid similar mistakes in the future.

However, *Finian's Rainbow* should not be thought of as merely a 'museum piece.' As Brannigan states, "for new historicists the nature of power may remain the same but the form it takes does not" (1998: 8). *Finian's Rainbow* may seem like "a musical that weirdly mixes fantasy, romance and political satire," but ultimately it is making a statement about the necessity of a balanced, uncorrupt power structure; a necessity that exists in all eras (Mandell, 2009). The magic and musicality of *Finian's Rainbow* captures the audience's imagination, but in the end they are left with a significant message:

May we meet in Glocca Morra  
Some fine day (143).

Glocca Morra, Harburg's famed symbol of utopia, is Gaelic for "'Lucky Tomorrow'" (Napoleon, 2009). Though cynics may view *Finian's Rainbow* as "a dated show with a problematic book," the hope for a better future will always be timeless (Mandell, 2009).

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